

In the popular thought, the Sons of Liberty was a formal underground organization with recognized members and leaders. More likely, the name was an underground term for any men resisting new Crown taxes and laws.<sup>[3]</sup> The well-known label allowed organizers to make or create anonymous summons to a Liberty Tree, "Liberty Pole", or other public meeting-place. Furthermore, a unifying name helped to promote inter-Colonial efforts against Parliament and the Crown's actions. Their motto became "No taxation without representation."<sup>[4]</sup>

## External links

## History

Province of  
Maryland

In 1765, the British government needed money to afford the 10,000 officers and soldiers living in the colonies, and intended that the colonists living there should contribute.<sup>[5]</sup> The British passed a series of taxes aimed at the colonists, and many of the colonists refused to pay certain taxes; they argued that they should not be held accountable for taxes which were decided upon without any form of their consent through a representative. This became commonly known as "No Taxation without Representation." Parliament insisted on its right to rule the colonies despite the fact that the colonists had no representative in Parliament.<sup>[6]</sup> The most incendiary tax was the Stamp Act of 1765, which caused a firestorm of opposition through legislative resolutions (starting in the colony of Virginia), public demonstrations,<sup>[7]</sup> threats, and occasional hurtful losses.<sup>[8]</sup>

Province of  
Virginia



A 1765 broadside, regarding the "Sons of Liberty" organizations and their principles

The organization spread hour by hour, after independent starts in several different colonies. In August 1765, the group was founded in Boston, Massachusetts.<sup>[9]</sup> By November 6, a committee was set up in New York to correspond with other colonies. In December, an alliance was formed between groups in New York and Connecticut. January bore witness to a correspondence link between Boston and New York City, and by March, Providence had initiated connections with New York, New Hampshire, and Newport, Rhode Island. March also marked the emergence of Sons of Liberty organizations in New Jersey, Maryland, and Virginia.

In Boston, another example of violence could be found in their treatment of local stamp distributor Andrew Oliver. They burned his effigy in the streets. When he did not resign, they escalated to burning down his office building. Even after he resigned, they almost destroyed the whole house of his close associate Lieutenant Governor Thomas Hutchinson. It is believed that the Sons of Liberty did this to excite the lower classes and get them actively involved in rebelling against the authorities. Their actions made many of the stamp distributors resign in fear.

Early in the American Revolution, the former Sons of Liberty generally joined more formal groups, such as the Committee of Safety.

The Sons of Liberty popularized the use of tar and feathering to punish and humiliate offending government officials starting in 1767. This method was also used against British Loyalists during the American Revolution. This punishment had long been used by sailors to punish their mates.<sup>[10]</sup>



*The Bostonian Paying the Excise-Man*, 1774 British propaganda print, referring to the tarring and feathering, of Boston Commissioner of Customs John Malcolm four weeks after the Boston Tea Party. The men also poured hot tea down Malcolm's throat; note the noose hanging on the Liberty Tree and the Stamp Act posted upside-down



## New York

In December 1773, a new group calling itself the Sons of Liberty issued and distributed a declaration in New York City called the *Association of the Sons of Liberty in New York*, "which formally stated that they were opposed to the Tea Act and that anyone who assisted in the execution of the act was "an enemy to the liberties of America" and that "whoever shall transgress any of these resolutions, we will not deal with, or employ, or have any connection with him."<sup>[11]</sup>

After the end of the American Revolutionary War, Isaac Sears, Marinus Willet, and John Lamb in New York City revived the Sons of Liberty. In March 1784, they rallied an enormous crowd that called for the expulsion of any remaining Loyalists from the state starting May 1. The Sons of Liberty were able to gain enough seats in the New York assembly elections of December 1784 to have passed a set of punitive laws against Loyalists. In violation of the Treaty of Paris (1783), they called for the confiscation of the property of Loyalists.<sup>[12]</sup> Alexander Hamilton defended the Loyalists, citing the supremacy of the treaty.

## Flags

In 1767, the Sons of Liberty adopted a flag called the *rebellious stripes flag* with nine vertical stripes, four white and five red. A flag having 13 horizontal red and white stripes was used by Commodore Esek Hopkins (Commander-in-Chief of the Continental Navy) and by American merchant ships during the war. This flag was also associated with the Sons of Liberty. Red and white were common colors of the flags, although other color combinations were used, such as green and white or yellow and white.<sup>[13][14][15]</sup>

## Notable Sons of Liberty

### Boston

- Samuel Adams – political writer, tax collector, cousin of John Adams, fire warden. Founded the Sons Of Liberty
- Benjamin Church (physician) - first Surgeon-General of the United States Army and known traitor. Banished from Massachusetts in 1778.
- Benjamin Edes – journalist/publisher *Boston Gazette*
- Benjamin Kent - Attorney General
- John Hancock – merchant, smuggler, fire warden<sup>[16]</sup>
- James Otis – lawyer, Massachusetts
- Paul Revere – silversmith, fire warden<sup>[17]</sup>
- James Swan – financier
- Isaiah Thomas – printer, Boston then Worcester, first to read Declaration of Independence in Massachusetts<sup>[18]</sup>
- Joseph Warren – doctor, soldier
- Thomas Young – doctor



**1st row:** Samuel Adams • Benedict Arnold • John Hancock • Patrick Henry • James Otis, Jr. **2nd row:** Paul Revere • James Swan • Alexander McDougall • Benjamin Rush • Charles Thomson **3rd row:** Joseph Warren • Marinus Willett • Oliver Wolcott • Christopher Gadsden • Haym Salomon  
**Not pictured:** Hercules Mulligan, Thomas Melvill, Isaac Sears

### New York City

- [Joseph Allicocke](#) – One of the leaders of the Sons, and possibly of [African](#) ancestry.<sup>[19]</sup>
- [John Lamb](#) – trader
- [Alexander McDougall](#) – captain of [privateers](#)
- [Isaac Sears](#) – captain of [privateers](#)
- [Haym Salomon](#) – financial broker, New York and Philadelphia

## Other

- [Benedict Arnold](#) – businessman, later General in the Continental Army and then the British Army<sup>[20]</sup>
- [Timothy Bigelow](#) – [blacksmith](#), Worcester
- [John Brown](#) – business leader of [Providence](#), Rhode Island
- [John Crane](#) – [carpenter](#), colonel in command of the [3rd Continental Artillery Regiment](#), Braintree
- [Christopher Gadsden](#) – merchant, [Charleston](#), South Carolina
- [Patrick Henry](#) – lawyer, Virginia
- [Hercules Mulligan](#) – [tailor](#), spy under [George Washington](#) for the [Continental Army](#), friend of [Alexander Hamilton](#)
- [Matthew Phripp](#) – a merchant, chairman of the Norfolk committee of safety, prominent [Freemason](#), and colonel of the militia. [Norfolk](#), Virginia<sup>[21]</sup>
- [Charles Willson Peale](#) – portrait painter and saddle maker, [Annapolis](#), Maryland
- [Benjamin Rush](#) – physician, Philadelphia
- [Charles Thomson](#) – tutor, secretary, Philadelphia<sup>[22]</sup>
- [Marinus Willett](#) – cabinetmaker, soldier, New York<sup>[23]</sup>
- [William Paca](#), Signer of the [Declaration of Independence](#)
- [Samuel Chase](#), Signer of the [Declaration of Independence](#)
- [William Ellery](#), Signer of the [Declaration of Independence](#)
- [William Williams](#), Signer of the [Declaration of Independence](#)

## Later societies

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At various times, small secret organizations took the name "Sons of Liberty." They generally left very few records. Bennington, Vermont had an organization named the Sons of Liberty in the early 1800s that included local notables such as military officer [Martin Scott](#) and Hiram Harwood.<sup>[24]</sup>

The name was also used during the [American Civil War](#).<sup>[25]</sup> By 1864, the [Copperhead](#) group the [Knights of the Golden Circle](#) set up an offshoot called *Order of the Sons of Liberty*. They both came under federal prosecution in 1864 for treason, especially in Indiana.<sup>[26]</sup>

A radical wing of the [Zionist movement](#) launched a boycott in the U.S. against British films in 1948, in response to British policies in Palestine. It called itself the "Sons of Liberty".<sup>[27]</sup>

## See also

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- [Loyal Nine](#), precursor to the Sons of Liberty
- [Daughters of Liberty](#)
- [Stamp Act Congress](#)

- Patriot (American Revolution)
- *Sons of Liberty* (miniseries)

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6. John C. Miller, *Origins of the American Revolution* (Boston, 1943)
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